

**Update on the Pistachio Recall Investigation
FDA/CDPH Joint Media Teleconference
March 30, 2009**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. All lines will be on a listen-only until the question and answer session of today's conference in which you will press star 1 to ask a question.

The conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time.

I would now like to turn today's conference over to Mr. (George Strait).
Thank you sir you may begin.

George Strait: Thank you operator. And thank you very much ladies and gentlemen and welcome. This is George Strait from the FDA's Office of Public Affairs. This is an FDA teleconference for credentialed media to be briefed on a food recall caused by Salmonella contamination that is unrelated--unrelated to the current Salmonella problem with peanuts.

We have speakers today from the Food and Drug Administration and from the California Department of Public Health.

Our speakers are Dr. David Acheson, Associate Commissioner for Foods here at the FDA, and that's A-C-H-E-S-O-N, and Dr. Jeff Farrar, F-A-R-R-A-R, Branch Chief Food and Drug Branch of the California Department of Public Health.

Remember after the speaker's make brief remarks we'll move to the Q&A segment. Reporters will be on a listen-only mode until we open up the call for all questions.

Remember when asking a question to please state your name and affiliation. And also please limit yourself to one question and one follow-up so we can get in as many questions as possible.

At this time I'd like to turn it over to Dr. David Acheson. David.

David Acheson: George thank you. This is David Acheson, Associate Commissioner for Foods at FDA. Thank you for being on this call with us.

And what I want to do is to brief you all on a recall of certain pistachio nuts. This is based on a joint investigation between the Food and Drug Administration and the California Department of Public Health. And I'm joined by my colleague Jeff Farrar from that office who will make some comments after I have.

Over the last few days FDA and California regulators have learned of contamination in pistachio nuts sold by Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella Inc, California. And that company is going to be recalling certain pistachio nuts based on these findings.

These findings came to light because of some testing that another company was doing as part of routine analysis in which they found a variety of different types of Salmonella.

Based on that, they contacted the Food and Drug Administration. We determined that these were coming from a facility in California, worked with

the California Department of Public Health, and identified the facility and have been inspecting and investigating in that facility over the last few days.

Based on that information and working with the firm they are going to be announcing a voluntary recall of pistachio nuts.

Now I want to emphasize right out of the gate, and this is very important: this is not Salmonella Typhimurium that we found in peanuts. This has nothing to do with the peanut outbreak whatsoever.

I will reiterate that point later, but as (George Strait) mentioned this is an important differentiation.

In terms of the volume of the recall, Setton Farms is going to be recalling approximately a million or so pounds of pistachio products.

This company packs products in large volume. For example 2000 pounds - between 1000 pound and 2000 pound containers which obviously in that volume are primarily going to wholesale facilities.

Because these products are going to wholesale facilities - and there's a relatively limited number of them, there's about 35 or 36 facilities that this firm is shipping to, these facilities are subsequently most likely repacking these pistachios or using them or selling them to other manufacturers who will be using them in other food products as ingredients.

So we anticipate that while the recall tonight is focused on approximately a million or so pounds of products from this one facility in California that the number of products that are going to be recalled over the coming days will

grow simply because these pistachio nuts have then been repackaged to consumer-level containers.

Just to comment briefly on illnesses associated with this outbreak - I'm sorry this recall. I want to emphasize that this recall was not triggered because of an outbreak in contrast to some of the previous situations, for example with the peanuts where people were getting sick and it was determined that peanuts - peanut butter was the most likely cause.

This is a situation that the recall is being triggered because of sampling undertaken by part of the food industry.

And what we are doing here is getting out ahead of the curve and it's a proactive approach from the Food and Drug Administration and California Department of Health.

There have been some consumer complaints associated with this product. Now that does not mean definitively that they caused the illness. It just means that individuals who had consumed some of these products had developed gastrointestinal illness and has called FDA to inform us of that.

So it is an association. And again to emphasize this is not linked to an outbreak and is a proactive move to get ahead of the curve here.

As I said, we first learned of this problem on March 24 when we were contacted by Kraft Foods who had done this testing.

And based on that, Kraft Foods had initiated a recall based on some of their products. And this is a recall that happened a couple of days ago. It was a product called Back To Nature trail mix.

I think an important point to mention here is - as I have said is that we are trying to be proactive.

We today had a new acting commissioner of FDA start Dr. Josh Sharfstein who is very clearly wanting to get out in front of this and we've been briefing him on a regular basis with what's going on with this situation. And we are being very proactive.

Obviously the goal here is get out ahead of this. As I said we do not know that it's linked to an outbreak.

We are working closely with the Centers for Disease Control to determine whether there's any evidence of the isolates that were originally found by Kraft and some others whether they are linked to illness. We don't have that information yet but we're actively engaged with the Centers for Disease Control to make that determination.

We have already briefed industry just very recently within the last hour of this situation, the food industry.

We're encouraging them to be proactive and we're looking to work with them very closely in terms of the response to this.

Now obviously at this stage the key question will be how far these products have gone through the supply chain and what - the consumer level may be impacted. And at this stage that is clearly one of our primary goals is to understand the distribution to the wholesalers and what they have subsequently done with the product.

At this stage of the investigation, even though there have been no illnesses directly associated with this product that we've been able to establish, obviously the question is, what should consumers do?

And our advice to consumers is that they avoid eating pistachio products, that they hold on to those products, that at this stage they don't throw them out, they just simply hold onto them as we're learning more about this to determine if they're part of the recall.

And as with the peanut recall in the past, we will be developing an interactive Web site as this recall expands.

So again to reiterate as this is involving our advice to consumers is to avoid eating pistachio products and simply to hold on to them as this situation unfolds. And we're going to be working very closely with industry to try to get our arms around this as quickly as possible.

And we're urging consumers to check FDA's Web site on a regular basis for the recall information.

With that - that's essentially a brief summary of the situation. And I'd now like to turn it over to California Department of Public Health. Jeff, over to you.

Jeff Farrar: Thank you David. This is Jeff Farrar with California Department of Public Health Food and Drug Branch.

Just to reinforce a couple of the points that Dave had made. We are trying to be proactive here. There are no illnesses known to be associated with this product as of yet.

We and FDA are trying to move quickly to prevent any possible illnesses from occurring.

We want to tell you that the investigation team is a joint team called the California Food Emergency Response Team. As soon as we became aware of this issue that team of investigators and scientists that trains together for these types of events was dispatched to the Setton Farms facility in Terra Bella, California, began reviewing records, reviewing production practices, and collecting hundreds of environmental and product samples there and moved those to the lab as quickly as possible.

And those samples are underway and it'll be several days before we begin to get the results of those samples.

With that David I'll turn it back to you.

David Acheson: Thank you. I'll hand it back to (George) for questions.

George Strait: Thank you both, David and Jeff. At this time ladies and gentlemen we'll take your questions.

And as always to try to be fair to everyone let's limit your question to one question and one follow-up.

And operator, we'll take our first question now. Don't forget when you get on, reporters, make sure that you give us your name and your affiliation.

Operator, we are ready.

Coordinator: Thank you. At this time if you would like to ask a question, please press star 1. Please un-mute your phone and record your name clearly when prompted.

That's star 1 if you would like to ask a question.

To withdraw your request press star 2.

One moment please for our first question.

And our first question today is going to be from Elizabeth Wiese. Please state your affiliation.

Elizabeth Wiese: Hi it's Beth Wiese with USA Today. Thanks for taking my call. So it's Sutton, S-U-T-T-O-N, Farms?

David Acheson: S-E-T-T-O-N--S-E as in "egg."

Elizabeth Wiese: So they had seven farms - and so two questions. First do we know which subtype of Salmonella it is?

David Acheson: We've isolated several subtypes - well we have - I'm sorry let me be clear.

The food industry who've been testing this product have isolated a number of serotypes. None of them are Salmonella Typhimurium.

We've actually got at least four different types that have been identified by food industry and they are: Montevideo, Newport, Seftenberg, and...

Elizabeth Wiese: Septem?

David Acheson: Seftenberg: S-E-F-T-E-N-B-E-R-G, and Larochelle, spelled L-A-R-O-C-H-E-L-L-E. So that's Montevideo, Newport, Seftenberg, and Larochelle.

And obviously what we will be doing is obtaining those isolates wherever possible, doing the genetic analysis, working with CDC, and then determining if there's any associations between those particular genetic fingerprints and illness in the CDC database.

Elizabeth Wiese: And - so follow-up question. Four types of Salmonella on seven farms and they're recalling a million pounds of products. Do you - is this all from one sample that Kraft got and that caused them to do their recall, or have you found environmental - do you have evidence that this is in the environment of those seven farms? How did you determine how broad (unintelligible)?

David Acheson: Let me just clarify. I'm not quite sure where you're getting seven farms from. That must have been something that I said. But there's nothing about seven farms...

Elizabeth Wiese: Oh I'm sorry. I may have - I thought it was seven farms were going to be - oh Sutton (sic) Farms - not seven farms I apologize.

David Acheson: It's the British accent. It confuses people. It's Setton Farms. It's got nothing to do with the number "seven."

George Strait: Beth thanks. Next question please.

David Acheson: Well wait a minute. I don't think I completely answered the question. This was based on a number of testings that were done - or a number of facilities. It's not based on a single result.

And environmental samples are pending.

George Strait: Next.

Coordinator: Thank you. The next question is from Andrew Martin. Please state your affiliation.

Andrew Martin: Hi it's Andy Martin at The New York Times. Yeah I just wanted to follow-up on what Beth asked. How did you come up with - I was going to ask where you came up with seven farms but how did you come up with a million pounds and I know that's an approximate number but...

David Acheson: Yeah.

Andrew Martin: what's the range and how do you determine a million pounds?

David Acheson: Maybe I'll direct that question to Jeff to answer. He's been more connected directly with the firm in California.

Jeff Farrar: Sure. This is Jeff Farrar California Department of Public Health. As our team has worked with the firm there in Terra Bella to try and identify the scope of the recall that poundage of approximately a million pounds - and I warn you that that number may change as the firm and our investigators firm up the actual tally.

That number was developed by the firm as they identified the scope of the recall to include all products from the 2008 crop year. So that is a number that was derived from the records at the firm but likely to change.

David Acheson: Yeah this is David Acheson. Certainly that number could grow. We're obviously getting ahead of this. This is early stages and that's just the status right now.

Andrew Martin: But the key point here is these are products from the 2008 crop year.

David Acheson: Correct.

Andrew Martin: Okay. Thank you.

Coordinator: Your next question is from Delthia Ricks. Please state your affiliation.

Delthia Ricks: From Newsday in New York. Can you tell us perhaps how many states may be involved, how many states received this product?

David Acheson: At this stage what we know is this a national distribution. And I don't actually have a list of the states that Setton Farms distributed to but what they have told us is that this is essentially national distribution.

Delthia Ricks: Thank you.

Coordinator: Your next question is from Garance Burke. Please state your affiliation.

Garance Burke: Hi good afternoon. Thanks for taking my call. I'm with the Associated Press.

Couple questions: first, I'm wondering if you know where the consumers who called reporting gastrointestinal problems were based.

And then I'm also wondering if you have a sense as to what kinds of products this firm shipped to. So right now, we have trail mix and we have roasted

pistachios that have been recalled in association with this firm. What other kinds of products might we anticipate could be caught up in this?

David Acheson: Well, let me take the first part. On the FDA side we have had consumer complaints, one from the East Coast and one from the West Coast. And I'm not able to be more specific than that in order to protect the people who contacted us.

In terms of what other products we may see coming out of this again I'd refer that to Jeff to comment on.

Jeff Farrar: At this point the firm has not provided any details as to the type of firms. We're putting that information together as we speak.

However, I think it will be safe to assume based on the volume that this well be an ingredient in a lot of different products that may possibly include things like ice cream, cake mixes, and so forth. We just - we have to follow the trail to be sure where we're going there.

David Acheson: But at this stage we don't know. All we know right now is that they're recalling the pistachio nuts themselves.

Coordinator: The next question is from Allison Aubrey. Please state your affiliation.

Allison Aubrey: Hi Allison Aubrey, NPR. A question - I'm wondering about these four types: Newport, Seftenberg, Larochelle. Do you have illnesses already this year with these subtypes and when will you likely be able to get the lab work done from the actual testing and match it up to see if it's - and match it up to see if these are likely associated with any kind of sicknesses?

David Acheson: Some of those serotypes, particularly Montevideo, and Newport, are pretty common. As you may be aware there are close to 2500 different types of Salmonella. This is just four of them.

And CDC tracks the common serotypes and Montevideo and Newport are pretty common. And so these - those particular serotypes are seen on a regular basis.

Now that doesn't mean they are linked to exposure to these pistachios because the key question is does the genetic fingerprint from these genetic isolates match the genetic fingerprint that came out of sick patients. That's the key question.

In terms of how quickly we will know that the isolates are being shipped to FDA as we speak. They should be with us within 24 or 48 hours and then it may take us a week or so to make that determination.

So we may have more news by the end of the week on that one.

Woman: (Unintelligible).

George Strait: Sorry operator, we didn't get the affiliation of that last reporter's question.

Woman: NPR.

George Strait: Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you. And our next question will be from (Shelly Pierce). Please state your affiliation.

Shelly Blujay Pierce: Good afternoon: (Shelly Blujay Pierce), Native American Times. This may be a silly question but any idea what may have brought this outbreak of the types of Salmonella? Any clue at all as to where this came from, why that plant has the problems that it - are we dealing with a cleanliness issue? Any kind of information as to where this may have originated?

David Acheson: This is David Acheson. Essentially when you're dealing with a raw product that's grown out in the environment there's always a possibility that it will be contaminated with Salmonella.

At this stage we don't know exactly how the contamination occurred. There's certainly some hypothesis that there may have been a cross-contamination between raw product and roasted product. But that's part of what the investigation will get to the bottom of.

Jeff anything you can add to that?

David Acheson: I think you covered it David.

Shelly Blujay Pierce: So we're not specifically saying that it was the processing plant or the way that they handled something. This could be something similar to what we had with breakouts with the tomatoes, correct?

David Acheson: Well essentially the product is roasted. So it goes through a kill step so to speak.

Shelly Blujay Pierce: Right.

David Acheson: And if the Salmonella are on there, the roasting process should take care of that. The raw pistachio is roasted to a temperature that should kill Salmonella.

So the fact that roasted product, roasted pistachios have tested positive for Salmonella would suggest that there was either cross-contamination or there was an environmental contamination or there was - the roasting wasn't at an adequate temperature.

And all that - those questions are part of the investigation as to how that happened.

Shelly Blujay Pierce: Okay makes sense. Thank you both.

David Acheson: Sure.

Coordinator: And Matt Sloane, your line is open. Please state your affiliation.

Matt Sloane: Matt Sloane from CNN Medical News but you just answered my question. Thank you.

Coordinator: (Unintelligible).

David Acheson: One point I want to reiterate--this is David Acheson--is, just to make sure that we don't have any confusion, that we're not dealing with an outbreak here. This is a proactive move by the firm to recall contaminated product and potentially contaminated product and it is very distinctly not linked to an outbreak just in case - I want to make sure that that message gets over. I apologize for interrupting.

Jeff Farrar: David, Jeff, let me just chime in that the firm has been cooperative in the investigation. We have appreciated that cooperation.

The firm is working very hard to collect all the information we have asked for. In fact the firm is already turning around trucks in transit to bring those back to the facility.

So so far we have had a very cooperative investigation.

Coordinator: Thank you. And the next question will be from Mike Himowitz. Please state your affiliation.

Mike Himowitz: Medpagetoday.com.

Man: Hello?

Mike Himowitz: Yes, medpagetoday.com.

George Strait: And what's your question?

Mike Himowitz: I wanted to know what - in the context of the pistachio industry how big is this? I have no idea how many pounds of pistachios are sold. Is this one of the largest suppliers of pistachios in the country?

And where were the pistachios actually grown?

Were they grown on this particular farm?

Are they all grown here?

Are they grown in other countries? Just any context you might have on that.

David Acheson: Jeff, can I refer that one to you?

Jeff Farrar: Sure David. Setton Farms relayed that their annual volume of production is somewhere around 600 million pounds. I believe you can also find that on their Web page.

They are reportedly the second largest pistachio processor in the country.

We are trying to determine the source of the pistachios that are being recalled. The firm has relayed initially to us that that is domestic - all domestic production.

We have yet to identify the specific location beyond that however.

Mike Himowitz: Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question will be from Lisa Schnirring. Your line is open and please state your affiliation.

Lisa Schnirring: Hi I'm with the CIRAP news at the University of Minnesota. Thanks for all the good information here today.

I just wanted to ask there were two earlier recalls. There was the Kraft one for the trail mix and then Kroger brand pistachios. And I'm wondering if the Kroger one is related to this as well.

David Acheson: Yes, this is David Acheson, it is. It is connected back to Setton Farms.

Lisa Schnirring: Okay. Thank you.

George Strait: We've got time for two more.

Coordinator: Thank you. And Malcolm Spicer, your line is open. Please state your affiliation.

Malcolm Spicer: Yes thank you: Elsevier Business Intelligence. I wasn't sure whether you said in your comments when it was that these contaminated ingredients left Setton Farms.

David Acheson: I didn't say that. What I said was that we - FDA first learned of the problem on March 24.

We don't know when the contaminated product left the farm but we're working right now on the assumption that it is linked to the 2008 crop which basically starts from September 2008 and moves forward. So it's somewhere in that timeframe most likely.

Malcolm Spicer: Thank you. And a follow-up would be if I understand it was another company that detected the Salmonella in some routine analysis they did.

David Acheson: That is correct. And they informed FDA.

And we then followed-up and realized it was coming from the California area so we started to work with the California Department of Public Health as a joint investigation.

Malcolm Spicer: Would you say that that is a detection that Setton Farms should've made?

David Acheson: Not necessarily. No, no. You know, it can be literally a needle in a haystack looking for Salmonella on product.

The good news here is that Kraft did find it. They acted independently and initiated recall.

They told us and we simply followed it up as we should. And that's what has resulted in this expanded recall.

So no there's no evidence that this is something that quote "Setton Farms should have done but didn't."

Malcolm Spicer: Very good.

David Acheson: As Jeff Farrar said they've been extremely cooperative.

Malcolm Spicer: Thank you.

George Strait: In many ways this is the way the food safety system is supposed to work.

David Acheson: Yes indeed.

George Strait: To protect instead of just to react.

Next question.

Coordinator: Thank you Garance Burke your line is open. Please state your affiliation.

Garance Burke: Hi I'm with the Associated Press. Thanks for taking my second question. Just to make sure I understand Dr. Acheson. So the four serotypes were found by California Public Health authorities after Kraft found the Salmonella in their routine testing, is that right?

David Acheson: No. No. Those four serotypes - and Jeff please jump in if you can clarify this some more. Those four serotypes were found by the firms who were doing the testing, not by the investigators.

We have a lot of samples that are in the lab. But those four serotypes were found by the firm.

Jeff, do you have anything to add to that?

Jeff Farrar: No I think you got it.

Garance Burke: And I'm sorry, those firms were doing the testing on whose behalf?

David Acheson: On their own. This was Kraft Foods who as a responsible food company was doing some testing. That's not unusual for food companies to do their own testing, which they did.

They found a problem and reacted to it appropriately. So they were - I think this is just a routine part of the food industry's activities is to do some testing.

Garance Burke: And have all of those four serotypes been subsequently found at Setton Farms?

David Acheson: No. I think - we've obviously - there's - I'm sorry there seems to be a little confusion around these isolates.

Let me just to try to re-explain that.

The testing was undertaken by firms who had received product. And some of the testing - it was all done on roasted pistachios.

And the testing revealed a number of different serotypes.

The FDA and California Department of Public Health have taken a lot of samples within the facility and those are right now within the lab.

So these serotypes that I mentioned are ones that have been found previously during the course of the last couple of months.

George Strait: One last question.

Coordinator: Thank you. And the final question today is going to be from (Jane Jung). Your line is open please state your affiliation.

Jane Zhang: Hi, The Wall Street Journal. I was wondering how can consumers tell which nuts are affected and how many companies are involved in this? I think Kroger is one (unintelligible).

David Acheson: Yeah. The short answer to your question is right now they can't which is why we're giving the consumer advice that I talked about earlier.

Obviously, where we are here is we're dealing with a million plus pounds of product that has gone to 30 some wholesalers in very large quantities: between 1000 and 2000 pound tote bags. Which those 1000 to 2000 tote bags, when they arrive at a wholesaler, they're going to be breaking those down into resale-size packages, or selling them to other manufacturers to use for pistachio flavored ice cream or cookies or candies or whatever.

At this stage we do not know what products are potentially part of this recall at the consumer level. That's something we're working with industry with and we're working with the firm with to get the distribution as quickly as we can.

So in the meantime the advice to consumers is to avoid eating pistachio product, not to throw them out because we clearly don't believe that this is going to involve all pistachio products.

But in the interest of caution and preventing illness we want the consumers to avoid eating them for the time being, hold on to the product, and we'll ultimately determine if they're part of the recall, and to be checking the FDA's Web site as that recall information is updated on a regular basis.

And that will be coming live just as soon as we've got material to load into it. And it will be updated very regularly as it was with peanuts.

George Strait: A follow-up Jane or no?

Jane Zhang: Do you know how many companies or are they any major names?

David Acheson: All we know is the 36 that received directly from Setton Farms. We don't know beyond that but that's part of what we need to determine.

Jane Zhang: Thank you.

George Strait: Thank you everyone. That concludes today's media teleconference.

Thanks for your participation.

Remember the replay will be available in about an hour and will be available until April the 6th.

If you have follow-up questions please don't hesitate to call the respective agencies.

Also, please check with both the FDA and the California Department of Public Health Web sites for updated information that was discussed here today.

Thanks a lot and have a good evening.

And we'll get a transcript.

Coordinator: This concludes the conference. You may disconnect at this time. Thank you.

END